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ART. XIX.—*On a Neo-Syriac Language, still spoken in the Anti-Lebanon.* By THE REV. JULES FERRETTE, Missionary at Damascus.

[Read 4th May, 1863.]

IN the spring of 1861 I passed through the town of Ma'lula, on my way from Ba'labakk (Baalbek) to Damascus. Ma'lula is one of the most curious towns not only in Syria, but in the world. It hangs in an apparently unsafe manner on the side of a perpendicular rock of very great height. The houses are partly excavated from the rock, and partly built upon one another. The streets are so steep that men have to walk on all fours and mules on two legs. The dogs, which in other eastern cities manage their affairs among themselves without belonging to any master, or seeming to notice any passer by, are here of an exceptional temper. They bark at travellers, and especially at the skirts of European coats, in a most threatening manner, so that one has to look after his legs, beside trying to keep his equilibrium. Ma'lula is full of antiquities, the study of which would abundantly repay the sojourn of an antiquarian for a whole summer. They consist chiefly of innumerable caves and tombs cut in the rock, wondrous carved figures of priests and kings, &c. The top of the mountain is a plateau, fertilized by a very large stream, the waters of which, divided into two mighty torrents, encircle the town, and loose themselves in a thousand rivulets under the walnut, mulberry, and pomegranate trees of the oasis below. On one side of the village is the famous convent of St. Thecla, inhabited by *bons-vivants*, monks of the Greek orthodox denomination, whose only business is to work miraculous healings of sick pilgrims, and to supply with cordial hospitality, and streams of the generous wine of the locality, any traveller who may repair to them, whatever his creed. Contrary to my custom, I was not their guest this time, but pitched my tent at the foot of the monastery, under a large tree near the mill. As soon as the news of my arrival was spread, the whole town came down to look at the traveller. Men and women, boys and girls, priests and monks, all sat around, to the unspeakable annoyance of my servants and soldiers, but to my great satisfaction, for I was glad to talk of the Gospel with these simple mountaineers. I had also

long been looking for an opportunity of having some idea of the Syriac dialect still spoken in Ma'lula and in two neighbouring villages, while it has disappeared, as a vernacular language, from the rest of Syria. I, therefore, took a pencil, sat on my carpet in the door of my tent, and without other formality proceeded to make a little Syriac vocabulary by naming divers objects in Arabic which they all know, requesting them to translate each word into their own dialect, and writing the answer on the red cover of an Arabic catechism, of which I had already distributed some scores of copies among them. I give this glossary in its unpretending form, as I was able to get it from those villagers, with whom I had only one night to spend.

ܢܥܐ	ܘܥܥܝܠ	ܡܠܟܐ	ܬܒܥܬܐ	ܚܕܐ	ܫܬܐ	ܐܨܬܐ	ܡܠܬܐ
sultan	flower	staff	belly	herb	king	tunic	head
ܚܕܐ	ܡܠܬܡܢܐ	ܫܬܐ	ܐܨܬܐ	ܡܠܬܡܢܐ	ܚܕܐ	ܫܬܐ	ܐܨܬܐ
road	ass	barley	church	hand	horse	teacher	town
ܡܪܥܬܐ	ܡܠܬܐ	ܚܕܐ	ܫܬܐ	ܐܨܬܐ	ܡܠܬܐ	ܚܕܐ	ܫܬܐ
apricot	river	war	roof	ox	eye	heaven	altar
ܡܠܬܐ	ܚܕܐ	ܫܬܐ	ܐܨܬܐ	ܡܠܬܐ	ܚܕܐ	ܫܬܐ	ܐܨܬܐ
morning	evening	day	night	field	water	light	sword

In the above words the pronunciation of Ma'lula is simply Syriac, but has a striking peculiarity. It is known that in Hebrew the long  $\alpha$  is pronounced  $a$  by the Spanish and Italian Jews, as well as by the translators of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, whereas the Polish and German Jews pronounce it  $o$ . The vowel  $\omega$ , the Syriac correspondent of the Hebrew long  $\alpha$ , is pronounced  $a$  by the Nestorians, and  $o$  by the Jacobites and Maronites. In Ma'lula both pronunciations are used by the same person in different words, and by different persons in the same word. No sooner was a word given to me in the one pronunciation, than some other person present pronounced it in the other manner, except in a few words in which all seemed to be agreed.

In the following words some of the Syriac letters are pronounced by the Ma'lulans in such a peculiar and unexpected manner, that I have thought it necessary to exhibit the pronunciation by means of the Arabic alphabet, supplemented by the two Persian letters پ and چ.



أَحْضَرُ كَسْ مَهْلَهْدْ أَصْطَحْ خَصَبْ 'أَنْسْ لَحْصْ نَعْلْ .	
اغْفِرْ لَمْ حَطَّيْنَحْ اِخْمَنْ غَافِرِينَ أَنْحْ لَابِنْ نِيْشَا .	
. onis filio nos dimittentes sicut nostrum-peccatum nobis dimitte	
لَا بَنْكَلَسْ صُفْهْ:صُفْهْ. نُهْنَسْ مَحْضَا مَهْنَا . أَفْصْ .	
لَا تَتَخَلِّجْ بَجْغَرِيَانَا . نَجَّجْ مَحْلُ شَرِيْرَا . أَيْمِينَ .	
. Amen. malo omni-ab nos libera. tentationes-in nos-inducas no	

I regret that this translation is not more adequate, but it is all I could get. My principal object was not so much to have a perfect Neo-Syriac version from the original Greek, as to have an intelligible and authentic specimen of the Ma'lulan dialect. When I saw it impossible for me to get from them what I wished, I feared, if I insisted more, that I should get some apocryphal words forged for the purpose of pleasing me. I, therefore, took what they gave, and brought the effort to a close.

This translation of the Lord's prayer exhibits leading features of the declension, the conjugation, and the use of affixes. But how great would have been my pleasure had I been able to get the whole conjugation of one verb or two. In this attempt I was very imperfectly successful. Notwithstanding all my entreaties here is the preterite, which was forced upon me, and which in some persons looks like that Syriac present which is formed of the participle and pronoun.

Ipsē occidit . . . .	هو اَقْتَلْ	3	اَصْهَلَا	SINGULAR.
Tu occidisti . . . .	هَيَّ قَتَلَجْ	2	اَصْهَلَا	
Ego occidi . . . .	انا قَتَلْتُ	1	اَصْهَلَا	
Ipsi occiderunt . . . .	هَنْ قَتَلْ	3	اَصْهَلَا	PLURAL.
Vos occidistis	هَيَّجَنْ قَاتَلِينَ جَنْ	2	اَصْهَلَا	
Nos occidimus	اَنْحَ قَاتَلِينَ نَحْ	1	اَصْهَلَا	

The conjugation of the verb ܠܚܬܝܒ is interesting on account of the wonderful changes of pronunciation in the letters ܠܚܬܝܒ.

## PRETERITE.

Ipsc scripsit . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒ	ܠܚܬܝܒ	3	SINGULAR.
Tu scripsisti . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒܬ	ܠܚܬܝܒܬ	2	
Ego scripsi . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝ	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝ	1	
Ipsi scripserunt . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	3	PLURAL.
Vos, scribentes-vos	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	2	
Nos, scribentes-nos	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	1	

## IMPERATIVE.

ܠܚܬܝܒ

## ACTIVE PARTICIPLE.

Scribens . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	m.	SING.
Scribens . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	f.	
Scribentes . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	m.	PLUR.
Scribentes . . .	ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ	f.	

## PASSIVE PARTICIPLE.

ܠܚܬܝܒܬܝܢ

When I asked for the future, I was told that there existed none, and that the preterite was used instead of it. This is a manifest contradiction to what we see in the Lord's prayer, where futures are used, and that not only in verbs of almost Arabic forms, but also in a perfectly Syriac verb as ܠܚܬܝܒ.

The imperative, as far as I was able to ascertain, undergoes no alteration in the feminine or plural.

The passive participle is ܡܚܬܒܐ, pronounced ܡܚܬܒܐ. It is strange that the form which should, according to analogy, have been that of the masculine plural of the passive participle should have been given to me by the natives as that of the active participle of the same gender and number.

I could get no participles from ܡܠܐܝܬܐ, but was told that ܡܠܐܝܬܐ means a murder, and ܡܠܐܝܬܐ a battle.

I have given all that I was able to gather in a few hours sojourn. Incomplete as information so hastily gathered must necessarily be, I thought it was not to be neglected. In the defect of other information it will be better than nothing; but I rather hope that it may excite others, if not myself, to make a fuller study of an interesting dialect, which, pressed as it is on every side by the Arabic, is likely very soon to disappear.

It is very remarkable that the only three villages of Syria in which the Syriac is still vernacular, though in a corrupt form, do not belong to the Syriac Church. Some are Muhammedans, and some Christians of either the Greek Orthodox or Greek Catholic denominations, both of which have their liturgies in Arabic.

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